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ABSTRACT

This study, part of a larger Comparing Reading Approaches in First-Grade Teaching (CRAFT) Project, was concerned with the subsequent reading performances of disadvantaged urban black children who were identified as having some word recognition ability at the time they entered first grade. All the children in this study, early readers as well as nonearly readers, were taught to read by the skill centered or language experience approach. Those that had some word recognition ability had substantially higher reading scores, and this advantage persisted and grew throughout the 3 years of the study regardless of the method by which they were taught. The author concluded that reading skills learned prior to the time the child enters first grade are not detrimental to long-range achievement. The results suggest the desirability of trying systematic reading instruction in kindergarten for disadvantaged children with superior reading readiness. References are included. (NH)

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THE READING PERFORMANCE OF DISADVANTAGED EARLY AND NON-EARLY READERS FROM GRADE ONE THROUGH GRADE THREE

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Much of the concern related to early reading has been directed at the age when young children can be taught to read and specifically with the question: Can some five-year olds be taught to read? Recent answers to this question are in the affirmative. (1,2,3,4,5,6,7). On the other hand, very few studies attempt to determine the follow-up effects of the early reading. (3,7). In the absence of such information, those opposed to the teaching of reading at an age that is earlier than customary maintain that there is no justification for teaching reading before first grade because no permanent advantage accrues to early readers.

The present study, which is part of the larger CRAFT Project*, (8) was concerned with the subsequent reading performance of disadvantaged urban black children who were identified as having some word recognition ability at the time they entered first grade. Fifty-eight children, or four per cent of the total population, were selected on the basis of their ability to identify one or more words in print. These children were identified by teacher nomination, checked by administration of the Detroit Word Recognition Test.

All the children in the study, early readers as well as non-early readers were taught to read by one of two approaches, Skills Centered or Language Experience. Children in the Skills Centered Approach were taught either by a Basal Reader Method or by a Phonovisual Method which combined the use of basal readers with a phonics system taught separately. Within the language Experience Approach children were instructed either by the Language Experience Method in which the early reading materials were developed from the experiences and verbalizations of the children, or by the Language Experience Method supplemented by much use of audiovisual equipment.

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* (Comparing Reading Approaches in First-Grade Teaching)

Children assigned to a particular reading approach at the beginning of Grade 1 continued to receive instruction in the same approach in Grade 2. At the third grade level the majority of the children had moved from the experimental schools and no control was attempted over the approach used by classroom teachers. It is safe to assume that at that grade level most of the children were taught by an approach which closely approximated a Skills Centered form of instruction. The third-grade results were obtained by searching the records of the city-wide testing, and include children who left the experiment even before the end of first grade.

No special reading program was provided for early readers at any grade level.

Early in the first grade information concerning pupil readiness was gathered using the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Tests, the Word Meaning and Listening subtests of the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test, and the Thurstone Pattern Copying and Identical Forms Tests. Regulations of the Board of Education of the City of New York prevented the use of a group mental ability test, even for research purposes. Near the end of the first grade, the Stanford Primary 1 Achievement Test, Form X, was given. In April of the second year, Form C of the Metropolitan Advanced Primary Reading Test was administered, and in April of the third year, Form A of the Metropolitan was given.

Grade equivalent scores were obtained for group mean raw scores, and comparisons were made between the early readers and the total CRAFT population (including the early readers); between early readers and a group of non-early readers matched on the basis of mean score attained on the Learning Rate subtest of the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Test; and between early readers in the Skills Centered and Language Experience Approaches whose Learning Rate Means were approximately equal.

Results

On all of the first grade pretests, early readers showed advantages over the total group significant at the .001 level (Table 1). They had unusually high results on the subtests of the Murphy-Durrell with mean scores averaging twice as high as those of the total population. Thus as a group they were considerably above the rest of the CRAFT population in aptitude for learning to read.

Table 2 provides grade equivalent scores over the three-year period for early readers and the total group. At the end of the first grade early readers had higher scores on all reading subtests ranging from an advantage of .2 years in Paragraph Meaning to .5 years in Word Reading. All differences were significant at the .001 level. At the end of the second grade, early readers surpassed the total population by .8 years in Word Knowledge, 1.1 years in Word Discrimination, and .6 years in Reading. Again, the differences were significant at the .001 level. At the end of the third grade, an increased difference favoring early readers rose to 1.1 years in Word Knowledge, and to .8 years in Reading. These latter differences were significant at the .01 level.

Table 3 shows the differences between early readers and the group of non-early readers matched with them on Learning Rate. Here again early readers held an advantage at the end of the first grade and increased that advantage by the end of the third grade. There were significant differences on all comparisons except two at the second-grade level.

Table 4 shows a progressive review of the differences between the Language Experience early readers and the Skills Centered early readers. Clearly at the end of the first grade the groups were essentially alike on the basis of mean grade equivalents. At the end of the second grade, the two groups were similarly even. On the third grade level the greatest

differences are visible. Here, the Language Experience Approach children achieved six months higher in word knowledge and five months higher in reading than the Skills Centered group. Neither of these differences were significant, however. Both groups were above the grade norm of 3.7

Summary and conclusions

Some disadvantaged children who enter first grade nave word recognition skills which they have acquired in the home, or from some form of pre-school education. These children were as a group superior in reading readiness at the beginning of first grade. They had substantially higher reading scores than their peers at the end of the first grade, and this advantage persisted and grew throughout the three years of the study, irrespective of the method by which they were taught. Thus, it appears that reading skills learned prior to the time the child enters first grade are not detrimental to long-range achievement. The results suggest the desirability of trying systematic reading instruction in kindergarten for disadvantaged children with superior reading readiness.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t Tests for Total Population and Early Readers on Pretests, Grade 1

Subtest	Total CRAFT			Early Readers			
	N	Mean[a]	S.D.[a]	N	Mean[a]	S.D.[a]	t
Murphy-Durrell							
Phonemes	993	9.90	8.56	51	22.93	13.27	10.83***
Capital Letter Names	1,007	11.17	8.83	49	21.82	6.24	8.31***
Lower Case Letter Names	793	8.89	7.21	35	17.71	6.96	7. ***
Total	793	20.31	15.41	36	39.72	13.12	7.43***
Learning Rate	1,064	8.17	4.03	55	12.09	4.23	7.17***
Metropolitan Readiness							
Word Meaning	1,124	5.25	2.28	56	6.96	3.01	5.57***
Listening	1,125	6.79	2.58	56	8.77	2.28	5.71***
Thurstone							
Pattern Copying	1,062	2.69	3.84	56	5.95	5.01	6.32***
Identical Forms	1,102	5.36	6.16	56	10.71	7.23	6.44***

[a] Weighted

***$p < .001$

Table 2

Differences in Grade Equivalent Comparisons of Total Population and Early Readers from Grade 1 through Grade 3

Date Given	Test	Total CRAFT N	Total CRAFT R.G.	Early Readers N	Early Readers R.G.	Difference
April, 1965	Stanford					
	Word Reading	1,127	1.4	51	1.9	.5***
	Paragraph Meaning	1,111	1.5	51	1.7	.2***
	Vocabulary	1,113	1.4	51	1.8	.4***
	Word Study Skills	1,111	1.4	51	1.9	.5***
April, 1966	Metropolitan					
	Word Knowledge	629	2.4	33	3.2	.8***
	Word Discrimination	630	2.4	33	3.5	1.1***
	Reading	628	2.3	33	2.9	.6***
April, 1967	Metropolitan					
	Word Knowledge	820	3.3	40	4.4	1.1**
	Reading	812	3.4	40	4.2	.8**

***$P < .001$

**$P < .01$

Table 3

Differences in Grade Equivalent Comparisons of Early Readers and Matched Non-Early Readers from Grade 1 through Grade 3

Date Given	Test	Total CRAFT N	Total CRAFT R.G.	Early Readers N	Early Readers R.G.	Difference
April, 1966	Stanford					
	Word Reading	34	1.6	34	1.9	.3**
	Paragraph Meaning	34	1.6	34	1.8	.2**
	Vocabulary	34	1.5	34	1.8	.3*
	Word Study Skills	34	1.5	34	1.8	.3*
April, 1966	Metropolitan					
	Word Knowledge	26	2.8	26	3.2	.4
	Word Discrimination	26	2.7	26	3.5	.8*
	Reading	26	2.6	26	2.9	.3
April, 1967	Metropolitan					
	Word Knowledge	39	3.4	39	4.5	1.1**
	Reading	39	3.4	39	4.2	.8**

**P .01

*P .05

Table 4

Differences in Grade Equivalent Comparisons of Early Readers from Grade 1 through Grade 3, by Approach

Date Given	Test	Skills Centered		Language Experience		Difference
		N	R.G.	N	R.G.	
April, 1965	Stanford					
	Word Reading	31	1.9	20	1.9	-
	Paragraph Meaning	31	1.8	20	1.7	.1
	Vocabulary	31	1.8	20	1.8	-
	Word Study Skills	31	1.9	20	2.0	.1
April, 1966	Metropolitan					
	Word Knowledge	17	3.2	16	3.1	.1
	Word Discrimination	17	3.5	16	3.5	-
	Reading	17	2.8	16	2.9	.1
April, 1967	Metropolitan					
	Word Knowledge	22	4.1	18	4.7	.6
	Reading	22	4.1	18	4.6	.5